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UNCLAS MANILA 000596

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TAGS: [OTRA](#) [JA](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR EAP/MST OFFICE DIRECTOR SCOT MARCIEL

Ref: A) UNCLAS STATE 020486

¶1. Post warmly welcomes the February 27 to March 4, 2007, visit of Scot Marciel traveling to the Philippines for consultations with Embassy staff. Point of contact for this visit will be ConOff Ben Reames. He can be reached at (63)-(2)-528-6300, ext. 2171 and at ReamesBN@state.gov

¶2. Post has arranged lodging at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Makati Ave. corner of Paseo de Roxas, Makati City, Manila for Mr. Marciel. The telephone and fax numbers are, respectively: (632) 750-8888 and (632) 817-2472. The confirmation number is: 285903. Reames will meet Mr. Marciel at the airport.

Terrorism:

¶3. Terrorism: The terrorist threat to American citizens in the Philippines remains high. The Embassy continues to receive reports of ongoing activities and of planned multiple attacks throughout the Philippines by known terrorist groups. The Embassy urges visitors to observe vigilant personal security precautions, to remain aware of the continued potential for terrorist attacks against Americans, and U.S. or other Western interests in the Philippines.

¶4. The Philippine government has been engaged on and off in negotiations with Communist and Muslim rebel groups. Nonetheless, rebel activity and armed banditry in certain areas of the Philippines still pose security concerns. The Communist Party of the Philippines and its terrorist military arm, the New People's Army, operate throughout the country and have issued public threats against U.S. citizens and interests in the Philippines. Americans are urged to exercise caution when traveling throughout the country and are specifically warned to avoid hiking or camping in the vicinity of Mt. Pinatubo in Pampanga Province.

¶5. In Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, kidnappings, bombings, violence, and insurgent activity make travel hazardous in many areas. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which the U.S. Government has designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization, has kidnapped several Americans and other foreign tourists since April 2000. Some were freed after substantial ransoms were paid, some escaped or were rescued by military action, and some were killed. Other kidnapping gangs operate in the same general area and have abducted a number of foreigners for ransom.

¶6. Operatives of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which the U.S. Government has also designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization, are also present in the Philippines. JI is an extremist group linked to al-Qaeda and other regional terrorist groups and has cells operating throughout Southeast Asia. Extremist groups in the region have demonstrated a capability to carry out transnational attacks in locations where Westerners congregate. Terrorist groups do not distinguish between official and civilian targets.

¶7. U.S. citizens and interests may be at increased risk of terrorist actions from foreign or domestic extremist groups in the Philippines. There are periodic reports of plans for possible terrorist acts aimed at U.S. Government facilities or personnel, public and private institutions, and transportation carriers. The

Embassy takes all such threats seriously. The RSO reminds all visitors to remain vigilant with regard to personal security issues and always to follow basic and important security countermeasures: do not establish a pattern or routine in movement and travel; vary the times and routes taken to the extent possible; maintain a low profile; and immediately report any unusual activity, to include possible surveillance, to the RSO. In light of recent events, the State Department urges all visitors to maintain a high level of vigilance and to increase their security awareness when traveling throughout the Philippines. All visitors are urged to review the State Department's most recent Public Announcement on the Philippines. Due to the United States' efforts in the on-going War Against Terrorism, the potential for retaliatory acts against Americans worldwide is real.

Crime:

¶18. Crime: As in many of the major metropolitan areas in the United States, crime is a serious concern in Metro Manila. As a rule of thumb, visitors are advised to exercise good judgment and remain aware of their surroundings. Reports of confidence games, pick-pocketing and credit card fraud are common. Be wary of unknown individuals who attempt to befriend you, especially just after you have arrived in country. A number of recent robberies and assaults involving the "date rape drug" (known locally as Ativan) have occurred; the drug is generally administered to unwitting male and female visitors via food or drink. It is best not to accept food, drink or rides in private vehicles from strangers, even if they appear legitimate. There have been several kidnappings and violent assaults of foreigners in the Metro Manila area, although Americans have not been specifically targeted in such crimes. There have also been reports of gunmen robbing foreign passengers in vehicles traveling to and from the international airport.

¶19. Taxis are the recommended form of public transportation. However, the following safeguards are important: do not enter a taxi if it has already accepted another passenger; and, request that the meter be used. If the driver is unwilling to comply with your requests, it is best to wait for another cab. It is also a good idea to make a mental note of the license plate number should there be a problem. When driving in the city, make certain that the doors are locked and the windows rolled up. All other forms of public transportation, such as the light rail system, buses, and "jeepneys" should be avoided for both safety and security reasons.

¶10. Visitors should also be vigilant when using credit cards. One common form of credit card fraud involves the illicit use of an electronic device to retrieve and record information, including the PIN, from the card's magnetic strip. The information is then used to make unauthorized purchases. To limit your vulnerability to this scam, never let your card out of your sight.

¶11. A continuing problem is the commercial scam or sting that attempts to sell or to seek negotiation of fraudulent U.S. securities. Visitors should be wary when presented with supposed Federal Reserve Notes or U.S. securities for sale or negotiation. Common sense is the rule of thumb.

Travel:

¶12. Travel: Before traveling to the Philippines, we urge you to visit the State Department's web site at www.state.gov for the latest security and travel information. All visitors should defer travel to isolated beach resorts and avoid personal travel to the islands of Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago. The RSO must approve all official travel to these islands in advance.

¶13. If you have additional security-related questions, you may contact the RSO either through your control officer or directly at (632) 528-6300, ext 2290, (632) 522-2337 (FAX), or at RSOmanila@state.gov (unclassified email).

KENNEY